1: Ammar E, 1-5 (1951) 1954
MR13 Fellahin MR13
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to and decided by a Government superior to local sanctions, the esteem of local institutions has been undermined and the traditional structure of authority has lost some of its grip.

If the villagers have increasingly resorted to Government procedures in their disputes, they still consider both Government and Government officials as agencies of imposition and control, and hence to be feared. The identification of any Effendi wearing European suit and fez with a policeman is indicative of the role of the Government in the people's mind. The first strong impact of centralized Government was probably during the reign of Mohammed Ali, when its pressures were felt through conscription, the rigid collection of taxes, and the registration of land. For a long time in Egypt this apprehension held towards the Government was connected with education, since education and conscription were associated during the days of Mohammed Ali, while hitherto war had been the business of a certain caste and farmers were not concerned with it. The fear of Government authorities is reflected in the story of the old man in the village who had been very annoyed and did not speak to his son for a long time because the latter was entangled in a dispute for which the father had to be called to the police station to give evidence. The father considered his going to the police station as a humiliation brought to him by his son.

It is also considered as a betrayal to report cases of infectious diseases to the authorities, as this would cause trouble to the family by involving the father and the mother in governmental queries and procedures. To keep away from governmental institutions was always the safest policy. An example of this is the failure of the branch of the Agricultural Credit Bank established in 1938 to help the farmers to have their crops secured, to borrow money accordingly, and thus to rescue them from falling a prey to usury. The bank has been in fact mainly used by outside crop merchants to buy crops from the village and store them until prices improved. It only functioned to its full capacity during the last war when governmental legislation compelled every farmer to sell part of his crop to the Government according to the land he cultivated. The villagers have never taken to the benefits of the bank, partly because it involved becoming implicated with Government procedures, and partly because it implied loss of prestige, due to dealing with interest, which is religiously forbidden. For the same reason, life insurance is never entertained by the villagers, nor by a great section of the Egyptian society as a whole, partly because it involves interest, as well as because it presents a challenge to man's destiny. In 1950 the branch of the bank in the village had to be closed down. Yet this does not mean that usury is not practised amongst the villagers in Silwa in spite of being condemned by the Koran, although it is not widespread and is avoided as much as possible.[1]

[1] M. Gaudefroy-Demombynes, in talking about the Koranic prohibition of 'riba' (increase, interest) in Moslem society remarks that 'it was in that very society . . . that

1: Ammar E, I-5 (1951) 1954
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Koran, and readings of the Prophet's birthday story. During all this, the children would either be sitting behind the adults or clustered in one of the corners of the house ready to execute their elders' commands.

Later on, the actual circumcising of the boy takes place. The child is now the centre of attention. He sits on the ground with a colourful girl's headcloth round his neck, while the village barber shaves his head, a task which should occupy him for three or four hours before performing the operation. Meanwhile, as the women are rejoicing by singing and playing on the tambourine inside the house, the father's invited relatives and friends would be bringing along their contributions (nakout) of money or of corn. Every time the father receives a contribution, he tells an announcer, who is a specialist for this job, that so-and-so has delivered his contribution. The announcer in a chanting voice declares that so-and-so, adding his relationship to the child if he is a close relative, or just adding paternal uncle or maternal uncle, has presented the 'bridegroom' with silver and gold, and entreats God to compensate him with all the good things in the world. The name of one contributor might be announced more than once, and this depends on the amount of contribution, and the closeness of relationship to the child. After each contribution, the village barber shaves, or at least pretends to shave, a little more of the boy's hair. When the father sees that all those whom he has invited or expected to contribute have arrived, the announcer retires, by which time the barber has finished shaving the boy.[1] Then the actual circumcision takes place by seating the child on a large vessel. The instruments for the operation are nowadays given to the barber by the Ministry of Health as well as instructions and ointment for the post-operative treatment.

Just before the operation begins, the child casts off the girl's headcloth and puts on a new garment consisting of an open white shift covered by another open green garment, similar to the type of dress which a religious person is expected to wear on certain occasions. During the operation, the boy is encouraged not to cry or show any signs of pain, otherwise he would be accused of girlishness. He is held back, and forcibly prevented from looking at his penis, otherwise it is believed he would become impotent.

This is immediately followed by a procession of men and boys followed by women and girls to visit the mosque, after which a group of female relatives and friends of the mother, together with the children, take the child to gaze on the Nile water. During all this, sweets, dates, and peanuts would be distributed. For a whole week the child, wearing charms round his neck, is not encouraged to walk, and is fed not so much on bread or meat, but mainly on boiled eggs, dried peas, salted peanuts and rice.

After a week or ten days, the circumcised boy is taken with other boys on a round asking for the 'custom' (al-'ada) from relatives and neighbours, and friends in the village. On this occasion all the boys carry palm-tree

[1] If the boy is too young for a head shave, his older brother or cousin may take his place.

1: Ammar E, I-5 (1951) 1954
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branches in their hands, and in front of every house they stand chanting at the top of their voices, while swaying their branches. They call out together, 'Give us the custom, either a pigeon, a fat hen, a cock, or an egg'. At the end of the round the group of boys return home with what they may have collected to partake of a meal well-prepared by the mother of the circumcised boy. This round is actually considered to be the female contributions to the circumcised boy and his family. In this way the boy and his age group not only witness the web of social reciprocity, but they are actively introduced to it.

852 304 The purpose of circumcising girls, according to the village midwife, is to prevent any suspicion on the bridegroom's part that the bride is not a virgin. The midwife, with her surgical instruments provided by the Ministry of Health, seats the girl on a chair, or vessel, while three women assist her by holding the girl's legs apart as well as supporting her back, a posture very similar to that assumed at childbirth. Girls are usually circumcised at a later age than the boys, when they are about seven or eight.

After the operation the legs are tied together at the thighs and ankles to prevent violent movement and thus render the operation successful. The ties are usually undone after a week or ten days, during which time the girl is fed in a similar way to the boy.

852 431 Anthropologists consider circumcision ceremonies as *rites de passage*; they are undoubtedly of great significance to the family, as well as to the child, especially if he is old enough. It is an intra-familial activity, and an occasion for the exchange of mutual obligations. The father receives his due contributions from relatives and friends to whom he has rendered such an obligation previously. Fathers keep a book, where they register those who have brought their contributions, and the amount which they have given. Traditionally, the fact that someone contributes to your ceremony counts rather than the amount of his contributions, that is, the relevant and compelling force is the carrying-out of mutual obligations on an occasion of circumcision. To illustrate this, a father who has one son should contribute to all those who have sent their contributions on the occasion of circumcising, not only their first sons, but all their sons. It is obvious here that the qualitative rather than the quantitative aspect of the social obligation is the more important. For the last ten years, however, there has been an increasing trend towards contributing on the same number of occasions as one has received a contribution from a particular person. Discussion and wrangling occasionally arise as to the appropriate way of 'give and take' on such occasions. Some people have struck a compromise so that the contributions are equalized between the same number of children, whereas the contributions towards the extra number of children are less in value and are made with a view to keeping the social relationships intact.

431 In ceremonies of circumcision, wedding, and preparation for pilgrimage, contributions (nakout) play a considerable part, especially in the case of

1: Ammar E, I-5 (1951) 1954
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## APPENDIX I

159 I had to leave and concentrate on memorizing the Koran. After one year
794 I finished the Koran and recited it for my Sheikh Ahmad Mousa to his satisfaction.[1] Then my father offered a "Karama" in the Kuttab, consisting of a meal of wheat bread and meat eaten in the Kuttab by the boys and whoever is present (as one is not supposed to invite persons for a "karama") together with a gift of a white garment to the Sheikh. This was followed by a ceremony called "dorah" (classical "dawrah") going round the village, with sheikhs reciting odes (qasidas) in praise of the Prophet, beating the drum and the tambourine (tar), and followed by other local folk as well as the Kuttab children. On this occasion I wore white [188] clothes; this is a holy practice like that of pilgrims returning from Mecca, who also don white clothes.[2] After this, I stayed in the Kuttab as an "Areef-prefect", repeating the Koran three times during the first year, at the end of which I sat for an examination (oral) set by one of the Ministry of Education inspectors, and on passing it I received a prize of £E2. I remained as an "areef" for three years, teaching the other children, learning the "Munawi mawled"—a rhyming prose as well as poems on the birth of the Prophet, the "matn-al-Ishmawi"—in the Islamic law (Fikh), "Matn al Jawhara" in monotheistic theology (Tawheed), which is in poem
159 form. From the age of nine I had to help my father and older brother in farm work, but I was not pressed to work as my family wished me to devote myself to Koranic studies, and this is one of the things that distinguished me from many other boys in the village. But later in life, especially after my marriage, I had to work harder in the fields. My older brother was responsible for bringing fertilizer from the hill, while my father and myself helped in the other farm tasks such as irrigation, distribution of manure, and harvesting.

'In 1940 I went to Edfu, where the first stage of military conscription [900] examinations takes place, and I was exempted on the basis of my knowing the Koran, after I had succeeded in the oral examination held for the purpose.[3]

'A year before I was called up for conscription, I left the Kuttab and devoted myself to farm work, and I got married when I was nineteen years old. I worked on my father's land until 1944, when I was appointed as a malaria supervisor to distribute tablets of quinine to the families during [749] the malaria epidemic. For this purpose I had to make a survey of the population in the village to distribute the tablets, accordingly asking the

[153] [1] A memory task of some magnitude: the Koranic text is a little longer than that of the New Testament.

[903] [2] Wearing of white clothes on certain occasions is a symbol of ceremonial cleanliness and purity.

[900] [3] Till 1948, sons of village sundas and sheikhs, those who paid £E20 exemption fee, those who knew the Koran by heart and University students could be exempted from military conscription. Since then a law has been passed decreeing that military conscription is universal, with very few exemptions, e.g. the single supporter of a family in the case of the father's death.

1: Ammar E, I-5 (1951) 1954
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head of the family to sign or stamp whenever he received his allocation. I left this job when the malaria campaign finished in 1948 to resume my work in farming. Though farming is an honourable job, it does not suffice for the necessities of life these days and I am now looking for another job in the village.

'Later on I went to Cairo and Alexandria for a month to "see the world", and to visit the holy tombs in these two cities. Indeed, Cairo is the "Mother of the World". Yes, there is a lot of corruption and impiety, but it is preserved by the big Saints, the Mosques, and the "circles of knowledge" conducted in the Mosques. You can also hear the Koran recited beautifully on the radio, and of all this there is nothing in Silwa.

'I occupied some of my spare time in writing letters for some men and women who are illiterate, and who have relatives in Cairo or Alexandria, asking them for financial help or for clothes.'

On asking him to mention the important events in his life, he recorded:

'With regard to the important events in my life, I here refer to the incident that happened when I was very young playing with other children near the railway station. My playmates started to throw stones at each other and when I started doing the same, my stone smashed one of the glass windows of the building. I tried to escape the railway guard, but he caught me and I was sent to the omda who gave me three strokes with a stick, and my father had to pay for the repair of the glass.

'The second event I remember was my inability to speak for some time when I was fifteen years old. My parents were worried about it, and they took me to various Saints' tombs and religious men for treatment. At last they took me to a Saint's shrine near Isna, called Sheikh Al-Naggar, who is considered to be the best healer for such diseases, especially when one is "mounted by spirits" (jinns). There, with my mother, we spent a week, and from that time I was cured.

The third important event besides my marriage, occurred this year when I deputized for my father on a visit to Bardis, on the invitation of our "cousins" there who wanted to establish their holy descent.'

In assessing Ali's life with regard to his point of view as an informant he is in many ways representative of the learned section of the village population. He not only knows the Koran and is well-versed in religion, but he is also well aware of his mundane and practical duties. The greatest number of the learned men (Khotaba) of the village are either blind, lame, or landless. Ali, on the other hand, is a religious man who has occasionally performed religious functions on ceremonial occasions, and he is also a farmer who works in the fields. He takes part in reading the 'Prophet's Story' during the night-celebration of the Prophet's birth in his clan's guest house, and occasionally reads parts of the theological books on canon law (Fikh) to enlighten himself as well as other people on their religious duties. He is also called upon to write deeds and records, since his handwriting is excellent. He once told me that he took great pains

2: Blackman E-5 (1920-1926) 1927
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carefully put by amount to a considerable total, which may be profitably invested. Thanks to a lucky deal in cotton, or some other venture, the former humble itinerant vendor finds himself well on the way to becoming a man of substance.

The house-doors are often decorated with a china plate or saucer fixed into the masonry above the lintel, as a charm against the evil eye. A house may also be decorated with coloured line-drawings of camels, boats, trains, trees, and other objects, some hardly

FIG. 9. A VILLAGE STREET

identifiable. Such artistic efforts denote that one or more members of the family inhabiting the house have performed the pilgrimage to Mecca, the design representing the various objects seen by the pilgrim on his way to the sacred city.

The interiors of the villages are often very picturesque, in spite of the dirt and squalor usually found in them. The Arabs are far more particular in this respect, their villages and settlements being much cleaner in every way than those of the Egyptian peasants. This difference between the two races is so marked that I can almost always tell if a village is Arab or Egyptian directly I enter it.

A mosque is to be found in every village, and in many places

2: Blackman E-5 (1920-1926) 1927
MR13 Fellahin MR13
Upper Egypt

## CHAPTER II

### THE WOMEN AND CHILDREN

562 114 FOREIGNERS are often heard talking about "the poor oppressed Egyptian woman." She is spoken of as overworked and ill-treated, and her husband as a brute without feeling or thought for her. I would have my readers bear in mind that in this book I am dealing only with the *fellāḥīn*; I have no intention of discussing or criticizing the aspirations for emancipation which are now finding voice among many Egyptian ladies of the upper classes. What I have to say here concerns the peasants only, among whom I have sojourned for several years. No one is more anxious than I am to see the status of Egyptian women raised, for until they are made fit to hold a higher position in their world there is, I think, little chance of the country taking a more exalted place among the nations of the earth.

868 562 [872] The girls' education should be entirely practical to start with, and book-learning should come by slow degrees. They should be taught the best way of carrying out their domestic duties, which are, after all, very simple—how to cook their food in a cleanly way, [863] to realize that hands should be carefully washed before handling food or mixing the flour and kneading the dough for bread, and [515] [250] that a *clean*, not a dirty, dress should be worn when they are engaged in any culinary operation. They should also be made to realize that if they would spend but half an hour to an hour every morning sweeping their mud floors and the ground outside their [356] house-doors, and then burning the refuse, they would have both healthier and brighter homes and villages. At present they are without the most elementary knowledge of hygiene, and are unmethodical in the carrying out of most, if not all, their domestic duties. It is in matters such as these that the village girls need instruction first and foremost.

562 The somewhat inferior position that the peasant women occupy in village society compared with that of the men follows as a natural consequence of their greater ignorance.

2: Blackman E-5 (1920-1926) 1927
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Numbers of these prophylactics may be seen hanging from the necks of the hapless infants.

The various primitive medicinal remedies, well known to, and used by, all village matrons, are of such a nature that one wonders how any child manages to survive at all. Most of the women have a deeply rooted objection to going to a doctor for advice, supposing one to be available in the neighbourhood ; and I have found it hard work to overcome this prejudice, even in the case of people who know me well and who have every confidence in me. It is encouraging to hear that the Egyptian Government has recently allocated a certain sum of money for the purpose of starting baby-welfare centres. If only these institutions can be got into good working order, and can be utilized for the purpose of training young girls in the proper care and management of children, it will be a big step in the right direction, will ensure a much stronger and healthier peasantry, and will put an end to a vast amount of unnecessary suffering. During the years I have lived among these people I have had hundreds of sick children of all ages brought to me, and it has been heartbreaking to realize, as having had no medical training I inevitably must, that I am quite incapable of dealing with the terrible diseases from which they are often suffering. As will be seen in some of the subsequent chapters, a great deal of this sickness is due to superstition—taboos against washing, for instance, being very strict.

Much good has, of course, been done by the dispensaries, which in the past were run by Englishwomen ; but they are naturally limited in number, and the mothers will often defer taking their children there for advice and medicine till it is almost too late, or, at any rate, till the child has become very ill indeed. I myself had the privilege of seeing something of what was accomplished by an English lady at one of these dispensaries during the first three or four years that I resided in Egypt. I can bear witness to the splendid work she did, and I know how much she was loved and respected by the hundreds of poor women who brought their children to her for treatment. I am sure, from what I have heard of similar institutions in other parts of the country, that the same good work has been done by many others in the different provinces. The number of these dispensaries is not great enough to meet the crying need, and those that do exist have to be supported by funds from the Government, for they receive practically no support, so

2: Blackman E-5 (1920-1926) 1927
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## THE FELLĀḤĪN OF UPPER EGYPT

case of bad skin disease has been alleviated by application of boracic cream! Cascara also is largely in demand, and it is no exaggeration to say that I give away hundreds of these tabloids every year. Cases of fever likewise have recovered rapidly with judiciously administered doses of aspirin or quinine. This practice of mine has earned for me the name of the Sheikheh Shifā (the Sheikheh of Healing), and it is a title which I much appreciate and

FIG. 130. COW BRANDED AS A CURE FOR PAIN IN THE LEG

value, however undeserved it may be. I have been much touched by the gratitude shown me by many of my poor patients, and in some parts of Egypt there have been occasions when I have treated over a hundred of them a day (Fig. 131). It brings me into close touch with the people, and gives me opportunities of talking to the women about keeping their children clean and impressing on them the value of soap and water. I now make it a rule never to give medicine for any child who is brought to me in a dirty state. The mother has to go home and wash it first, and then bring it to me again. I am glad to say that they nearly always return with a very much cleaner infant.

Greater facilities for providing the peasants with adequate medical treatment are urgently needed in Egypt at the present

2: Blackman E-5 (1920-1926) 1927
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Upper Egypt



time, and it is most encouraging to hear that the Government is now setting aside certain sums of money with a view to erecting more hospitals. Such a scheme deserves every encouragement and support.

FIG. 131. SOME OF MY PATIENTS

leaf may be picked with them. When the pouch formed by raising the lap of the *gallabiya* is filled, the worker goes to empty it in a clearing in the middle of the field, and then resumes his place in the line. From the clearing an endless file of fellaheen carries the cotton to the storeyard (*shoona*) belonging to the owner or the bank. Thence, some time later, it will go on donkey or camel back to the ginning and pressing factory, where from September to April, in an atmosphere of stifling dust, thousands of fellaheen, especially children, load and unload the ginning machines which separate and sort the seeds [25]. After a third picking nothing is left on the fields but brushwood. This is pulled up by hand, or cut down level with the soil, then bound into bundles and stacked on the rooftops to be used as fuel.

### *B. The Poor Man's Bread*

After cotton, maize is the most important crop, covering about a million and a half feddans. Its introduction and general adoption are comparatively recent, though it became popular in Egypt before cotton, and was already well established in the Mameluke period.

In 1810 Sylvestre de Sacy wrote: "*Dura*, a large species of millet, is one of the commonest crops in Upper as well as Lower Egypt, and the people live in great part on bread made from *dura*."

*Dura* is the Arabic name for maize. The Ministry of Agriculture calls it *dura shamiya* or Syrian maize, to distinguish it from *dura eweiga* or *rafi'a*, the ancient millet.

Throughout Africa, wherever there is sufficient water and a rich soil, the different varieties of millet are giving place to maize, a cereal of American origin which is easy to cultivate, quick-bearing and favourable to a subsidiary crop. This is especially the case in Egypt. In fact the *dura rafi'a* is now planted only on about 300,000 feddans in Upper Egypt, where the basin irrigation system still holds, and is growing rarer with the advance of perennial irrigation. Maize has conquered the Nile Valley, because it has proved so suitable to the fellah and to the soil that it is reputed the world's best. Only that of Mozambique can compare with it.

The fellah sows it broadcast in July, gives it plenty of manure, and waters it seven times. Thirteen to fifteen

(3) *Health and Sickness*

291 The fellah's clothes are no more of a barrier against the elements than his work. They cut him off from neither air nor sun, earth nor water. This absorption into his environment gives him abundance of physical life. His robust 142 and hardy constitution is in harmony with nature. For 513 sleep he needs no mattress, no comfort. He bears the most 151 brutal incisions without a cry. Colds, headaches and the foulest odours trouble him not at all. His appetite never fails, and his extremely sensitive hearing catches the slightest sound, human or other.

164 Very often, unfortunately, Nature turns treacherously upon him and infects his unsuspecting body with diseases which fatten and undermine him. These are endemic diseases which are rooted in the peasant class. Let us say nothing of tuberculosis or hereditary syphilis, which are the fellah's constant companions. Far more dangerous are bilharzia, ankylostomiasis (hookworm) and malaria, which in some *mudiriyas* affect more than 80% of the population. [515] These arise from lack of cleanliness, and too close a contact between man and the soil.

But the most noticeable are the eye-diseases. Though the greenness of the fields is restful to the sight, the heat and glare of the sun and still more the thick dust which no rain ever lays, the sandy wind from the hardby desert, the dung, the flies, and dirty fingers all combine from childhood to inflame and infect the eyes, if not to blind them. It is impossible to pass through a village without being struck by the number of blind and one-eyed people going about. According to statistics they amount to 60% of the population. In 1927 it was officially recorded that there were 266,550 one-eyed people and 110,000 completely blind. In 1937 the provinces of Minia and Assiut were credited with 50,000 either one-eyed or blind. In actual fact there are more than that. There is no counting the bleary or bloodshot looks, the eyes dimmed by glaucoma or trachoma.

Another scourge is *bilharzia*(41). This is a form of haematuria caused by a parasite which is absorbed into the system through the skin. The fellaheen make their ritual ablutions [515 daily, often side by side, in any sort of water, and work bare-744] foot on the damp earth or in the mud of the drains. The larva of this parasite, which is peculiar to Egypt, grows

743 Special hospitals have been established to fight against
744 the three diseases in every *bandar*, or provincial capital.
164 These, however, can only treat patients from the immediate neighbourhood. It is difficult for others to leave their villages, in which there are no hospital facilities. If they all went to the *markaz*, the Government doctor and his pharmacy would be overwhelmed.

You may tell a sick man that he has no excuse. The towns are full of hospitals; there is free medicine at the dispensaries, and any number of doctors available.

"Yes", he will reply, "but there is no doctor in my village. And if there were, I could not afford to pay him any more than to buy medicine. As for going away to hospital, I cannot leave my wife and children. And how should I live while I am away? Where should I find money to pay for my food and lodging? I prefer to trust in Providence" (44).

A friend of the author's who is an *omda* gives a different view. "In the old days a sick fellah had to ride for three hours on donkey-back to get to hospital, whatever his condition. Now we have built a free dispensary in the village itself. A doctor comes four times a week, and when he is away he can be called by telephone. In this way treatment has become easier."

759 If the fellaheen go to the barber for treatment (till
744 they die of it), this is because he is the only available practi-
743 tioner, just as the money-lender is the only available source of loans. The proof is that, when the mobile medical services arrive in a village, the fellaheen come eagerly for help and submit with unflinching confidence to any sort of treatment.

743 Take for example the travelling hospital at Tahta. The
744 Ministry of Public Health rented a site for six months, and
164 tents were set up by the Department of Epidemic Diseases. Everything was clean. Before the opening day a publicity campaign was carried out in the surrounding villages, and a ceremonial opening was arranged. One doctor and six assistants were at the disposal of the patients, who were treated free. The average attendance was eighty a day, of whom twenty-five had hookworm and only three had bilharzia (this was Upper Egypt). But these splendid efforts on the part of the Ministry of Public Health are no more than a drop in the ocean. Unfortunately, the fellah's

own habits often neutralise the treatment he receives, so that these diseases remain as deep-rooted as ever in the peasant class.' If only they would pay attention, until more can be done, to the advice and directions which are given them! The answer is that even if they tried they could not hope to succeed, because the conditions under which they live are at every point unfavourable to the attempt. Here lies the heart of the problem.

### (4) *Food and Drink*

Water is the first problem; not this time considered for its use in irrigation, which has been studied over and over again, but as a much more vital need in supplying human nourishment. Egypt is a hot country, and the fellah's work makes him sweat, so that thirst affects him more than most other people.

Where the owner of an *'ezba* has installed a pump, the fellaheen may get their water from an artesian well. If their village is on the river bank, they will use water from the Nile, which is silty but fresh-running. But more often than not they can drink only brackish and stagnant water from the irrigation canals.

In these, men and animals cleanse and relieve themselves; vegetables, clothes, and crockery are washed, and carrion is thrown away: and this is the place to which women come to get "drinking water". They bring it home in the early evening, in their ewers or tins, to fill up the great pot, or *zir*, that stands against the house wall. Each fellaha brings back about six gallons each evening for the next day's use. This water she adds to what already remains in the *zir*, so that the bottom is never dry, and never cleaned. The water stands all night, so that some of the dirt settles. It also cools, owing to evaporation through the porous clay. As for the drops which filter through, and which might be used to fill the drinking-pots with pure water for the morning, they simply run to waste in puddles or are drunk by the fowls.

The Government, however, is busily studying the question of supplying drinking-water to the villages, and numerous plans have been made.

Men have always added something to water to give it a taste. The fellah is no exception. Wine he does not drink,

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material is used, that is to say the nearest available earth. 361
Thus large holes have been created, which have been dug 516
deeper and wider, and have then filled up with water. These
are the *birkas* or village ponds, which serve as drinking- [515
troughs for animals, as swimming-pools for children, and 481]
sometimes as sources of water for the housewife.

The Government has had fifty-odd of these hotbeds of 164
disease filled in, not without meeting opposition from the 657
fellaheen, whose habits and customs have thus been disturbed.
Eighteen such ponds needed 10,000 cubic metres of earth.

Not far from the *birka*, still outside the village, is the 243
*gurn*, or winnowing and threshing-floor. This is a flat 251
patch of ground covered with cow-dung and earth, which has
been levelled and trodden down. Its size is proportionate
to the number of families that use it. The *gurn* is common
property, and nobody can appropriate it. It is big enough
for ten groups to work at a time, until all have winnowed
their corn. It also serves as a public square for meetings,
though often an adjacent piece of waste ground supplements
it for this purpose. Not far away can be seen a great rubbish 364
heap made of dirt, dung and carrion. This heap would over- 744
top the houses, if the dogs and birds of prey did not come
regularly to reduce it, and if the fellaheen did not take manure
from it. It would be an even greater danger to public
health than the *birka*, if the sun did not disinfect it.

Still outside the village, particularly in the Fayum 231
and in Middle Egypt, there may be square towers, as much as 343
thirty feet high, banded in black and white. Their heavy
base, seven yards by four, gives them the appearance of forts,
but they are in fact pigeon-cotes. You can see them assailed,
at sunset, each by a cloud of from fifteen to twenty thousand
pigeons coming back to roost after feeding among the fields.
The construction of these "houses", requiring an outlay of
from L.E. 200 to L.E. 300 each, is a specialised trade. It is
beyond the means of our fellaheen, and can be undertaken
only by an *omda* or big landowner. In the South a pigeon-
cote is often built on a corner of the rooftop, thus raising the
skyline of the village; but as a rule these houses with pigeon-
cotes, whether built-on or independent, do not form part of
the village itself. They stand apart, and can be distinguished
by their extra storey, their more pretentious appearance,
and their gardens. Such are the owner's villa on an *ezba*, or

474 existed in Egypt for the last twenty years. The Government recognised them officially by the Law of 1923 (amended in 1927). It made advances to encourage their development and enable them to buy seed, manure, cattle, and implements, on better terms. Since 1931 it has entrusted this task to the *Crédit Agricole*. The change was successful. The number of societies grew from 147 in 1927 to 703 in 1935, and the number of co-operators rose from 12,298 to 71,000. In 1935 L.E. 836,000 was borrowed from the *Crédit Agricole* by 544 of these societies, the others being financed by private capital.

The advantages of these societies are evident. They do away with shady middlemen, systematise production and prices, improve both quality and quantity, and buy and sell at the best conditions (*). They have a clearly-defined aim of social service. "The various types of co-operative societies, put aside part of their profit every year to be spent in the various social services, village reform, education, hygiene" and so on.

It is in Lower Egypt, and especially Beheira, that these organisations have spread most. In spite of their success they leave untouched the vast majority of the fellaheen, especially those whose need is greatest and among whom the co-operative spirit is least developed.

656 The Government has passed a number of measures for the protection of these grown-up children :

[426] (1) The law against moneylenders (1896) by which the usurer, who goes too far, is made liable to a heavy fine.

[659] (2) The establishment of *kalâka* cotton markets (1912) in which weights are checked and sales governed by current prices at the Bourse.

[651] (3) The suppression of the tax on date-palms (1920).

(4) The suppression of the *ghaffir* tax, a watchman's toll which the fellaheen had to pay (1936).

● 744 657 If the fellah's economic activity needs to be organised and controlled by the paternal providence of the State, how much more do his health and his housing ! But here planning is far ahead of achievement. The question is whether to begin by providing all villages with drinking-water, or first to build model villages whenever possible.

weekly fair, stores for wood, manure, and grain, and a fire station. Twenty thousand people are to live in this paradise, which will cover 45 feddans. The plan has not yet been carried out (74).

A single model village in the middle of a vast area is a drop in the ocean. Few people can either benefit by it or copy it. It would be better to spend the money on more useful projects such as supplying the villages with drinking-water. The benefit would be more wide-spread, say the advocates of this policy, and avoid the injustice of creating inequalities among villages. Why should one be chosen for a model, and others remain in their old squalor? A five-year plan was suggested for rebuilding the four thousand villages of Egypt at an estimated cost of thirty million pounds. This sum appears both moderate and feasible, when it is remembered that the Egyptian Government has spent forty-five millions on dams and irrigation work. The plan was given up, however, on account of the heavy expenses incurred under the Treaty of 1936, and perhaps also owing to the lack of public spirit (75).

The Commission set up for the reform of the medieval system of *'omdas* and for the betterment of conditions in the countryside has proposed the establishment of municipal councils in which the fellaheen should take part. There are already such bodies in existence in about sixty townships. They are composed of the Mudîr or the Mâmûr, the Inspector of Public Health, four elected members, and others nominated by the Ministry of the Interior.

Another institution, as yet not much developed, is that of the Village Councils, which were begun in 1918 and now operate in about seventy places. Their composition is similar, but their financial scope is very narrow. These bodies are limited in their activities to the watering of the principal streets (which does not do away with the mud), the construction of small public gardens (in which nobody may walk, for fear of spoiling them), and the erection of a few street lights. They might well be more representative of the village. Even if the *'omda*, instead of being nominated, were elected by his fellow-villagers, would that give him civic ideals? Specialised officials might be appointed to the village, such as a doctor, a visiting nurse, an agricultural expert, and a trained social worker. Or should the first aim be

744 to provide public conveniences, in the effort to combat the diseases which lessen the fellah's output ? The Ministry of Public Health, founded in 1934, has given this question priority in its programme, but it has not a large budget, and most of its income goes to pay the salaries of its officials. It has, however, some genuine achievements to its credit. Sixty-seven dispensaries, permanent or travelling, are fighting bilharzia and ankylostomiasis. There are as many hospitals, with about four thousand beds in all, for serious illnesses. In 1936 there were 111 eye-clinics, which had treated 1,133,599 patients. Infant welfare is organised in some forty centres. Doctors, midwives, and visiting nurses, instead of waiting for the peasant woman to come and ask for help, go round from house to house to give treatment and advice. At least half a million visits have been made. By 1937 there were about five thousand certified midwives, who had taken a six months' course in a maternity hospital, and eight thousand of the second class, who had from three to six weeks' training.

744 747 To these splendid efforts must be added the even more devoted labours of private institutions : the dispensaries and home visits of the Franciscan Sisters of Egypt and the many other Catholic sisterhoods, the Protestant foundations, such as the C.M.S. and the American Mission, and the more recent and methodical 'social centres' established in a dozen villages in the Delta.

It is a vast field, and these efforts up to the present have affected only thousands out of millions. Even those fortunate few often lose the benefit of their medical treatment through their ignorance, their unhygienic habits, and their poverty. These are the obstacles to progress.

183 744 A model village has no power to make the fellah a healthy man, immune from sickness. The work of the authorities in the provinces is hardly more succesful. So long as the fellah keeps his present ways of thought and the ignorance that hinders him from knowing what is good for him and what is not, he will remain, in spite of all the improvements that are offered him, exactly as he is today. He will refuse [271 356] filtered water and drink the impure water his fathers drank. Give him a light, airy, healthy dwelling, and he will pervert it to his own manner of life. He will still be unable to 183 profit from the laws and institutions provided to help him.

Greek, not satisfied with building good houses of red brick and concrete at L.E. 120 each, has arranged for a dentist and a doctor to come every week from the town. He has established a model school, and, best of all, has engaged an assistant for social work. This young Egyptian woman, the first to hold a diploma from the Alexandria School of Social Service, lives not in the owner's villa or the *nâzer's* house but among the fellaheen and close to the school, in a little room which she has fitted up charmingly. At 8 a.m. she opens her dispensary, and at 9 a.m. pays a medical visit to the school. Then she makes a round of the houses, gently discouraging dirt and disorder. She keeps a card-index of each family, and records its progress. She brings the girls together for lessons in child-welfare and sewing, and in the evening assembles the men to tell them stories and teach them how to amuse themselves in their spare time.

At the end of the first year, thanks to the fact that this service was continuous and close at hand, the women of the *'ezba* were washing themselves once a week, though they used only to take a bath once a year. This is because Doreyya did not make speeches to them about bath-tubs and shower-baths, but simply used what every peasant woman has at hand in her home, the *tisht*, the *halla* and the *kûz*.

Then there is the earlier example of a remarkable *ab'adiya* (isolated farm) in the *mârkaz* of Simbellawain. This 400-feddan estate, worked by direct cultivation, has been made by its *nâzer*, an Alsatian of good peasant stock who has been living and working there for twenty-seven years, into a paradise of order and health. The fellaheen are lodged in thirty-six small houses varying in size according to the number of children. They are built of red brick, with wooden roofs. The inside is newly white-washed every year. Nothing is kept on the roof, but each family has an adjoining patch of land, defined by an imaginary line, where dry brushwood and manure are heaped. Nobody encroaches on another's space. The labourers are paid three and a half to four piastres more than on neighbouring estates. They are each allowed one or two feddans for their requirements of maize or berseem, and almost every family owns a donkey and a goat, and either a calf or a *gamoossa*. Once a year everyone receives a new garment at the owner's

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39. *T.*—This is not quite true. Fellaheen are frequently to be seen in the Nile and in the canals, swimming and splashing about for pleasure after a hot day's work. [515 526]

40. *T.*—In 1943 the cheaper cotton stuffs were selling at a controlled price of P.T. 6 a metre, and a tailor would ask at least 15 piastres for the work. [463 435]

41. *T.*—At Akhmîm and Nagada in Upper Egypt a considerable weaving-industry still flourishes. The latter has a considerable trade with the Sudan. [288]

42. Dr. Theodore Bilharz (d. 1862) was a German lecturer at the Cairo School of Medicine. In 1858 he solved the mystery of this endemic disease by discovering the parasite that causes it, and thus made attack upon it possible. [744]

43. Department of Public Health : REPORTS AND NOTES ON ANKYLOSTOMIASIS AND BILHARZIASIS IN EGYPT : Government Press, Cairo, 1924,

This work contains a complete bibliography on the two diseases, with an account of their ravages in various villages of Egypt, and of the Government's attempts to fight them.

44. Ibnet ish-Shaty' : EL-RIF EL MASRI (THE EGYPTIAN COUNTRYSIDE), p. 125.

45. In 1935 Egypt imported 7,888 tons of coffee beans from Java, Santos and Yemen. [439]

46. See the ANNUAL REPORT for 1938 of the Central Bureau of Information on Narcotics. However, in a technical essay in the REVUE DES QUESTIONS SOCIALES (July 1940, pp. 94-106) entitled IS BLACK TEA HARMFUL TO THE HEALTH AND WORK OF THE PEASANTRY ? the author (who remains anonymous) feels justified in giving a negative answer. [272]

47. The famous Egyptian cigarettes are all made of imported tobacco. The intention was to avoid the danger of hasheesh as well as to gratify the Turkish Government. (The smoking of very cheap cigarettes has now become extremely common among the fellaheen. - *T*, 1945.) [276]

48. BAMIA and MOLOKHIA are two mucilaginous plants. The former, known in British colonies as OKRA, is 241 262

4:Walker E-4 (no date) 1934 MR13 Fellahin MR13
(ca. 1890)



violent of contagious diseases and the hardest to cure). Therefore let them have him spit into a handkerchief or a piece of linen, which is then dipped in tar and afterwards burned.

His relatives should call in a doctor to visit him. It is well known that menfolk do not reckon themselves ill unless they are confined to their rooms and unable to stir out of doors, that is, when the illness has become chronic and incurable. Whereas if it had been receiving attention it would not have been thus, except after a very long time, and at the beginning it would have been possible to repel it with ease. Frequently we have seen people suffering from pulmonary consumption, and in spite of that [p. 88] the answer of one of them to us when we asked him about his disease, was: "Allah forbid, I am not diseased." But before long we see the disease contradicting him, and he is confined to his house. And most of them are fated to die of these diseases for this reason.

It is encumbent on those who are consumptive to attend to the disease at the outset. But I fancy them saying, "And where can we find a doctor to consult every time; the cities are distant, and perhaps we go to consult a doctor and can't find him." I say, it is an easy matter. If the people of the villages desire to have a special doctor for themselves to cure them gratis, without their going to him, and to be at their command, they have only to take the trouble to ask him from the Government on condition that each one of them pays one millième per month (as His Excellency 'Alī Mubārak Pāshā reckoned) and as we demonstrated more than once in the well-known newspaper *al-Mu'ayyad*.[1]

## XLIV

## PAIN OF THE SHIḲḲA

This is generally applied to diseases of the spinal marrow and colic of the stomach and kidneys. They "prescribe" for the sick that two men should carry him by the head and feet

[1] [See Hartmann: *op. cit. index.*]